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ABSTRACT

This report outlines a K-12 social justice curriculum combining interdisciplinary instruction, guided and broadly-based research, and teamwork with teachers and students. Students also have opportunities to develop contacts with the media and other agencies at many levels outside the school, to research and support personal viewpoints, to study relevant subject matter and to increase social awareness and personal growth. The curriculum developed when administrators and teachers implemented the latest research in learning with vision and professional expertise. There are four parts to the curriculum development, including: (1) "Design a Logical Functional Plan of Curriculum Organization"; (2) "Design an Evaluation System for a Curriculum Plan"; (3) "Write a Set of Objectives for a Curriculum Plan and a Sample Indicator of Achievement for Each Objective"; and (4) "Describe Alternative Learning Activities for Each of Three Objectives." The three objectives ask students to: (1) apply knowledge to real world problems (homelessness); (2) relate knowledge from different subject areas; and (3) begin to develop a consistent philosophy of life. (EH)

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Homelessness and Social Justice: A Model Curriculum

The following curriculum combines interdisciplinary instruction; guided, broadly-based research; teamwork (teachers and students); contacts with the media and other agencies at many levels outside the school; opportunities to research, state, and support personal viewpoints; relevant subject matter; opportunities for personal growth; and social awareness. This curriculum is an example of what can happen when administrators and teachers implement the latest research in learning with vision and professional expertise. We are indebted to Mike Lewis, vice principal of Mount Savage School (Mount Savage, Md.) for this contribution.

HOMELESSNESS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

A. Design a Logical Functional Plan of Curriculum Organization

Organizing Threads. At the conclusion of the students' educational experience, they will be better human beings, both cognitively and affectively, which will result in more personal and positive relationships with themselves, others, and the community (i.e., more disciplined thinking, more compassion, empathy, understanding, and love). We want to create a democracy in which each student becomes an active, positive contributor to the community. The major organizing thematic thread is social justice, emphasizing the individual's and the government's responsibility in changing the status quo. Change is inevitable; it is growth that is optional. We want to experience growth.

Vertical Organization. The social justice theme provides continuity to a K–12 curriculum as well as the reinforcement necessary to promote life-long learning and activism. In deference to Bloom, Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, etc., the curriculum is sequenced to take advantage of students' cognitive and affective learning abilities at specific developmental stages. The approach is from the concrete to the abstract, from the simple to the complex, and from the general to the specific. Ideally, this occurs in a non-graded structure conducive to mastery learning.

Horizontal Organization. The social justice curriculum provides ample opportunity for integration. Based upon the fact that life is not departmentalized, the theme of social justice serves as the catalyst for the development of a boundary-free interdisciplinary educational experience grounded firmly in living experiences rather than in vicarious textbook analogies.

Content. Content revolves around the social justice theme and is implemented with an interdisciplinary approach. All content areas are consistent with the social justice theme.

Learners. The learners are grouped heterogeneously to reflect the real world. With the curriculum based on social justice, the heterogeneous experience reinforces the major curriculum objective. In light of the nongraded mastery approach, fluidity is the norm and locked-down tracking obsolete. The size of the group depends largely on the objectives and the learning activities.

Teachers. Teachers are arranged in interdisciplinary teams (e.g., math, science, English, social studies) modeled on our middle school experience.

Time. There are no bells. The block schedule is employed in an interdisciplinary boundary-free environment under the su-

pervision of trained team teachers. As a result of the interwoven social justice theme and interdisciplinary approach, many subjects are taught simultaneously.

Space. The school's philosophy is employed by architects and reflected in the school's design and construction. Although the facade of the building may be intractable, the interior and surrounding land are not. Spaces, organized according to our philosophy, include the design of work stations and team areas. The assembly-line approach associated with straight rows of desks is replaced by more user-friendly areas.

B. Design an Evaluation System for a Curriculum Plan

State Purposes. Demonstrate how a curriculum based on the social justice theme achieves greater and more lasting Maryland School Performance and Assessment Program (MSPAP) results.

Establish a Standard. All students achieve a minimum of 80 per cent on all indicators of achievement. They redo and resubmit all work that is judged less than standard.

Collect Evidence (Assessment). Each student builds a personal portfolio of the following types of work, each of which reflects the standard: a performance-based project; a criterion-referenced test of skills and processes; observation reports from peers, teachers, and self-evaluations (Likert-type scale + free response section); and essays (communication skills, spelling, grammar).

Quantify/Consolidate Evidence. Every entry in each student's portfolio meets the minimum standard.

Report Results. Results are reported to the principal, the supervisor, and the superintendent.

Make Decisions. Based on the results, it is apparent that the social justice thematic approach greatly promotes and reinforces the acquisition of MSPAP lifelong skills.

C. Write a Set of Objectives for a Curriculum Plan and a Sample Indicator of Achievement for Each Objective

Solve Problems Cooperatively Through Simulation. Negotiate a contract between labor and management that crosses categories of negotiating procedures, grievance procedures, working condition(s), assignment and transfer, professional development and educational improvement, personal and academic freedom, insurance benefits, payroll deductions, compensation, rights and responsibilities, ratification, and duration.

Apply Knowledge to Real World Problems. Based on the library and community research, implement one of the solutions to homelessness.

Relate Knowledge from Different Subject Areas. Using an interdisciplinary approach from the disciplines of history, contemporary world issues (CWI), philosophy, psychology, literature, and mathematics, compile a portfolio of six poverty-related issues.

Develop Knowledge of Opposing Value Systems and Their Influence on the Individual and Society. Develop a chart comparing and contrasting the liberal and conservative responses to three social problems.

Develop a Consistent Philosophy of Life. Explain one's position on when a human being becomes a human being within the context of biological reproduction and how this belief relates to one's view of abortion.

D. Describe Alternative Learning Activities for Each of Three Objectives

Apply Knowledge to Real World Problems (i.e., Homelessness).

1. Research in the library five statistics of homelessness, five causes resulting in such statistics, and five solutions to the problem of homelessness.

   Structure. Jigsaw—groups of three in which one student becomes the expert on statistics, one on causes, and one on solutions.

   Product. Each team produces an outline that summarizes their findings and shares it with the class. The class combines each group's information into one class summary. One elected representative from each class meets with the other class representatives to generate a CWI report to be presented to the principal for further action.

   Time. The representatives have three class periods, one additional hour before school, and one hour after school to prepare their final report.

2. Organize and implement a "sleep-out for the homeless" that incorporates the following components:

   a. Secure media coverage: print (articles and letters to the editor), radio, and television.
   b. Target contributors (local people, businesses, and organizations as well as local, state, and federal elected officials and agencies) and choose the best medium through which to reach them.
   c. Draft a cover letter explaining the impetus for the project, the need for such a project, who is participating,

and who receives the gifts of money, food, and clothing. Include guidelines for contributions.

d. Arrange for security (local and state police and chaperones).

e. Compose and post a survey on the Internet to access the nature of the problem in other communities and their responses to the problem of homelessness.

f. Write an explanatory letter to parents of participating students; attach a permission slip.

g. Develop a method for selecting student participants.

h. Coordinate the project with the school's community service program to broaden involvement.

i. Develop a project budget and timeline.

j. Design a sign-up sheet with one-hour slots and secure a guest "homeless person" for each hour slot (e.g., local politicians).

k. Coordinate with local and state organizations and elected representatives who deal with homelessness.

l. Design a diary format for the participants to complete throughout the night.

m. Reproduce copies of final CWI report to be distributed to the media and guests.

Structure. Think-pair-share and jigsaw.

Product. To create an awareness of the local, state, and national homelessness problem and to solicit gifts of food, clothing, and money for local homeless agencies.

Time. Planning and organizing—four weeks; set-up and sleep-out—14 hours; follow-up and collection period—two weeks.

3. In light of the fact that self-evaluation is a learning activity, each student develops a Likert-style evaluation survey and evaluates each activity listed under 1a on the chart provided. The chart is a scale ranging from 1 to 5 in which 1 symbolizes complete achievement and 5 symbolizes that the activity was completely unachieved. According to experience, circle the number that best exemplifies the state of that activity. The evaluation committee (student representatives) tallies the results.

Structure. Evaluation sheets are completed individually. The final tally is completed cooperatively within the committee.

Product. Using a spreadsheet, the final tally is entered into a computer. Any number of variations involving the information can be called up and produced.

Time. The evaluation sheets are completed in one class period. The final spreadsheet is completed by the committee within a three-period block arranged with cooperating teachers.

Relate Knowledge from Different Subject Areas.

Research the following topics in the library and various community services covered in class:

1. History of homelessness in the United States from 1800 to the present (statistics, causes, and solutions)
2. Psychology of homelessness (the effects of deinstitutionalization, mental illness, alcoholism, and drug abuse)
3. Literature concerning homelessness (fiction, non-fiction, novels, short stories, poetry)
4. Art relevant to homelessness (plays, movies, music, photographs, paintings, drawings)
5. Philosophical assumptions about the homeless and human dignity (the myth of rugged individualism and the American Dream)
6. Economics of homelessness:
   - The cost of housing the homeless vs. the cost of not housing them
   - The cost of permanent vs. temporary solutions
   - Governmental aid vs. private voluntary aid
   - How the low minimum wage contributes to a substandard existence in which millions of people—the "working poor"— find themselves one paycheck away from homelessness and destitution
   - Unemployment
   - The high cost of housing combined with a severe shortage of affordable low-income housing
   - Overwhelmed social services.
7. Politics and law (Democratic vs. Republican responses).

Structure. Think-pair-share; jigsaw. The class is divided into seven groups; using a lottery, each group is assigned a topic from the above list to complete the following activities:

1. Provide time to think about what they are looking for, briefly research the topic in the library, and then share it within their group.

   Product. A rough draft stating the group's objectives within the appointed topic and a brief outline of the resources to be used.

   Time. Thirty minutes.

2. Each group develops a research plan based on the scientific method.

   Product. A detailed outline of the objectives as they relate to the scientific research model presented in class.

   Time. One class period.

3. Exhaustively research the topic using the library and other community resources.

Product. A portfolio showing the completeness of the research must include a formal bibliography.

Time. Three class periods plus homework.

4. When the group completes its research, the class reconvenes to compile a class report.

5. A representative to meet with the other class representatives is elected to produce a final CWI report to be presented to the principal.

Product. A final CWI report summarizing the interdisciplinary findings.

Time. One uninterrupted day for the representatives to compile and complete their task.

Begin To Develop a Consistent Philosophy of Life.

1. Using the visual aids and research provided in class and in the library concerning human reproduction, defend one's position on when a human being becomes a human being entitled to a constitutional right to life.

   Structure. Think-pair-share and an individual report.

   Product. A written report defending one's view on the moment of humanness.

   Time. One class period plus complete for homework.

2. Using the outline provided, write a paragraph explaining how one's beliefs about the beginning of human life relate to one's view on abortion.

   Structure. Individual work.

   Product. A written paragraph explaining the previously-mentioned relationship.

   Time. One class period plus complete for homework.

3. The students receive a parental consent form and two copies of a survey on abortion. They complete one survey by stating their opinions and explaining why they hold them. The second survey is completed by a parent, guardian, or someone over the age of 40 (the second person does not have to explain his or her opinion). Once the survey is collected, the class tabulates the results and produces a final report that compares and contrasts their peers' opinions with those of their elders. The results are published in the school newspaper.

   Structure. The surveys are individually completed, but the final tally is a cooperative effort as each class brainstorms reasons why there is a discrepancy or a similarity between the generations on each survey question.

   Product. A report that compares and contrasts two generational views concerning abortion and parental consent accompanied by possible explanations for the results. A newspaper style report is also written.

   Time. Two class periods plus homework.

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